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Directorate of Intelligence
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Ukraine: Who Will Manage Chernobyl?

Summary

A pressing challenge for leaders in the newly independent Ukraine will be to reconcile the public to the fact that, although the republic may now control its political destiny, it will have to continue to defer to Russia on some economic and technical decisions. One such decision is the emotion-charged issue of the management of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the republic's overall nuclear energy industry. In the summer of 1991, the Ukrainian parliament passed a resolution asserting Kiev's right to exercise primary authority over atomic installations in the republic. Indeed, when a serious fire broke out at the Chernobyl nuclear power station a few months later, Kiev took the lead

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in dealing with the incident, rather than allow Moscow to handle the political and physical fallout as it had during the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.

Although the magnitude of this recent incident was only a fraction of the earlier one (no radiation was released), the fire was nonetheless a close-call reminder that Ukraine by itself could not yet cope economically or technically with another serious accident, and that it might, therefore, be unwise—or impossible—for Kiev to sever in the near future all ties to central nuclear authorities. In signing the historic Commonwealth pact with Russia and Byelarus on 8 December 1991, Ukrainian leaders openly acknowledged this interdependence by consenting to a separate clause calling for a "special agreement" on Chernobyl. We believe this clause will allow for Russian technical access to and control of the plant while decontamination and containment operations continue, probably for years after the shutdown of the reactors, which is scheduled for 1993. (b)(3)

Ukraine Tries to Take Control

Ukraine has had de facto jurisdiction over its nuclear power facilities since at least mid-1991, when the republic's parliament, responding to enormous political pressure stemming from the earlier Chernobyl accident, initially set a closure date of 1995 for the Chernobyl atomic energy station (AES). Ukraine has not yet ruled on the fate of four other nuclear power stations currently in operation, but it has declared a moratorium on new plant construction.

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Republic leaders have postponed a decision on a proposal by the former USSR Ministry of Atomic Power and Industry (MAPI)— the Moscow-based government agency that previously owned or oversaw all nuclear facilities—that would enable central authorities to retain some operational control. The proposal acknowledges repub-

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lic ownership of former MAPI nuclear plants but provides for a centralized agency to service and run the power stations through a joint-stock state corporation. The arrangement would almost surely rankle Ukrainian sensitivities because it epitomizes the pervasive influence over the republic's nuclear sector exercised by Russia, where MAPI support facilities and know-how are concentrated. As the experience of the Baltic nations shows, that influence will probably continue for some time: even Lithuania, which has achieved complete political independence, still relies on a contingent of Russian personnel to run its Chernobyl-type reactor at Ignalina. (b)(3)

The importance of these jurisdictional issues was illustrated in the accident that occurred on 11 October 1991 at the Chernobyl AES. That evening, an electrical malfunction in an operating unit of the plant sparked a serious fire, which caused a large section of the roof to collapse into a main generator room. No radiation was released because Ukrainian firemen, who were the first on the scene, extinguished the blaze in about three hours. Had the fire gone unchecked, however, it could have threatened the reactor itself, which would have required massive assistance that was beyond the republic's capability. (b)(3)

Anticipating the political uproar this close call might generate, the republic government seized the lead by immediately appointing a 14-member commission to investigate. Headed by veteran politician Viktor Gladush, the team included government officials, firemen, engineers, public health officers, and experts from the Ukrainian Ecology and Nuclear Institutes. Ukrainians with considerable experience in nuclear matters—including followup issues from the Chernobyl accident five years ago—helped constitute a highly visible Ukrainian majority among those dealing with the aftermath of the fire. (b)(3)

Moscow Plays it Down—But Not Out

To minimize the public's perception of danger and to forestall charges of interference in republic affairs, the Moscow-based MAPI kept a low profile in dealing with the accident. Nonetheless, it formed its own commission of inquiry and quietly set up a cen-

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ter at the AES to manage the fire cleanup. The MAPI, which has monitored incidents at all nuclear power stations throughout the former USSR, assigned a midlevel spokesman to issue information bulletins to reassure the public that there was no danger from radiation. (b)(3)

The Chernobyl Fires—Then and Now

The October fire showed that some fundamental leadership and policy management changes have occurred since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986:

- Authority to make technology-driven decisions that have strong political ramifications has shifted from central, industry-oriented organizations or individuals to local political bodies. In 1986, the republic's leadership was powerless against the central nuclear bureaucracy. In October 1991 the populace targeted the Ukrainian Council of Ministers and the parliament as the authorities best able to take action.
- The public is now demanding and getting honest answers. Unlike central authorities who tried to clamp a news blackout on the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, Ukrainian officials made a full disclosure to the public of circumstances contributing to the October accident, and they kept citizens informed throughout regarding the extent of danger. The story broke internationally within a few hours, and even the cautious Moscow press reported it on national television the morning of the 12th.
- Now, environmentalists constitute a strong and vocal political force. At the time of the catastrophe in 1986, there was no active environmental movement, much less one with clout. People who are environmentally conscious are no longer on the outside looking in; they often hold policymaking offices. Capitalizing on the publicity surrounding the October fire, environmentalists secured the endorsement of officials from nearby West European countries and neighboring Soviet republics and agitated for immediate closure of the station. On 29 October the Ukrainian parliament voted to shut down the station by 1993, instead of phasing it out gradually. (b)(3)

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Willing, But Able?

Much as Ukraine would like to decide the future of its nuclear industry without having to consider its neighbors, we believe it is inextricably linked to them by economic and technical bonds.

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Why They Cannot Go It Alone

Numerous obstacles hinder Ukraine from gaining self-sufficiency in nuclear power or doing away with it altogether:

Economic Constraints

- *One-fourth of Ukrainian electricity is AES generated.*
- *Remaining energy sources are indigenous coal production (down one-third since 1990) and imports of Russian oil (expected to rise in price).*
- *Ukraine, in the past a significant exporter of electricity, has slashed energy exports, and the country currently is renegotiating foreign contracts to bring hard currency earnings under republic control and to cushion against oil price hikes.*
- *To meet near-term energy needs, republic leaders may commission three nearly completed nuclear plants that had been put on hold.*

Technical Factors

- *Ukraine lacks the trained personnel, computer codes, and essential design information to sustain a nuclear industry.*
- *Most scientists, engineers, and designers are Soviet trained and indoctrinated in an industry culture biased toward centralization of authority and expertise.*
- *Technical documentation is in Russian; the official language for AES operations is Russian.*
- *Ukraine has no significant nuclear manufacturing. Because its reactors are Russian built, Russia is the logical spare-parts supplier and equipment integrator.*
- *Tasks such as data collection and dissemination on AES incidents and operations are routed through Moscow. The top research institutes are in Russia.*

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Ukrainians would prefer to seek technical assistance for their nuclear industry from the international community rather than from Moscow, and their chances of getting foreign help are good. Western firms are eager to deal with the republic, especially if they can help stabilize its nuclear industry. Notwithstanding the West's willingness to provide assistance, however, Kiev faces serious financial constraints that limit its ability to pay for Western technology and equipment; the republic will therefore be forced to rely on central--in effect Russian--experience and knowhow for the foreseeable future. (b)(3)

Ukrainian leaders must determine, therefore, how much interaction between the republic's nuclear industry and Moscow is politically palatable; one issue, for example, is whether the republic will join the joint-stock corporation proposed by MAPI. Ukrainian concurrence is essential for the plan to be workable because the republic is second only to Russia in its number of nuclear power plants. Local leaders may resist signing on, however, because of overwhelming public sentiment that Ukraine control its own industrial facilities. Moreover, republic leaders have expressed how little they trust central authorities to run the nuclear power sector in the best commercial or environmental interests of Ukraine. Backing for the plan would most likely come from the republic's nuclear industry workers and officials, who would probably judge this measure of central control and coordination a necessary evil to reduce the chances of a severe nuclear accident or to cope with one, should it occur. Given these conflicting points of view, Ukrainian leaders will have to maintain a balancing act because joining the corporation may provide their only access to the technical expertise they need until they develop their own nuclear infrastructure or obtain sufficient Western help. (b)(3)

Outlook: Reluctant Partners

The landmark 8 December Commonwealth accord, signed by Ukraine, Russia, and Byelarus, contained a separate provision (Article 8) on dealing jointly with the continuing effects of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster. Ukrainian leaders thereby implicitly acknowledged that, unassisted, they are unable to cope with the residual effects of that first accident. We believe the recent Chernobyl fire

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was a stark reminder to them that another major accident would overwhelm the fledgling nation and could threaten its economic and political viability. We expect Ukrainian leaders to incorporate the Article 8 arrangement into an ongoing gentlemen's agreement with vestigial central nuclear energy authorities to help protect against such a threat. We believe the agreement will be one in which the republic continues to work with existing organizations for as long as necessary (allowing for continued Russian technical access and control) but keeps the collaboration as unpublicized as possible. For at least the near term, Kiev must remain Moscow's cooperative—even if reluctant—nuclear partner. [ ] (b)(3)

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Appendix A
Players in the Aftermath of the Chernobyl Fire

Described below are the most prominent players associated with the October fire. Most are Ukrainian officials or public figures, but two Moscow MAPI officials who were responsible for the power plant at the time of the accident are also included. (b)(3)

The Establishment

The ranking Ukrainian official was State Minister for Industry, Transport, and Energy **Viktor D. Gladush**. A longtime party official, he was named chairman of the republic commission investigating the fire. Gladush had served since June 1990 as head of a USSR Council of Ministers commission charged with taking the AES out of service by 1995. He had also coordinated regional responses to previous emergency situations, including supervision of Ukrainian assistance to victims of the 1988 Armenian earthquake. (b)(3)

Gladush's deputy on the investigation commission was **Nikolay A. Shteynberg**, chairman of the Ukrainian State Committee for Nuclear Safety since its establishment in August 1991. Shteynberg was assigned to the Chernobyl AES in the mid-1980s, but he left just before the 1986 accident because of a personality conflict with the plant director. When the disaster occurred, he returned to the AES on his own initiative, assumed a position of authority, and participated in early cleanup operations. As a consequence, he was named deputy chairman of the USSR State Committee for Nuclear Safety, a title he held until assuming his current post. (b)(3)

The top MAPI official involved was **Erik N. Pozdyshev**, chairman of the Ministry's commission of inquiry into the causes of the fire and the measures needed for repair of the plant. He was the MAPI deputy minister in charge of all AES maintenance, operations, and accident coordination. Pozdyshev knows the Chernobyl station well; he was its director from right after the 1986 accident until probably mid-1989, when he was named deputy minister. His MAPI colleague, Chernobyl AES chief engineer **Nikolay A. Sorokin**,

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heads the center set up on 12 October to manage the fire cleanup. Both men have exercised a low-key response to the potential hazards of the fire, and both have stayed out of the spotlight focused on Ukrainian officials. (b)(3)

The Greens

Environmental activists **Yuriy N. Shcherbak** and **Vladimir A. Yavorivskiy**, on the other hand, have been vocal critics of the Chernobyl AES. Shcherbak is Ukraine's Minister for Environmental Issues and also chairman of Green World, the Ukrainian environmental group that played a large role in eliciting public demands that the station be closed. Although Shcherbak concedes that economic imperatives will probably keep the Chernobyl AES on line for a while longer, he has faulted Ukrainian power officials for failing to develop alternative energy sources. A physician for more than 30 years, he treated Chernobyl accident victims. Shcherbak published a series of articles and a documentary novel during the late 1980s describing the medical and environmental effects of the Chernobyl disaster. He said he felt compelled to unveil what he believed to be a massive propaganda coverup of Chernobyl's consequences. Shcherbak served as chairman of the Nuclear Ecology Subcommittee of the USSR Supreme Soviet during 1989-90. (b)(3)

Yavorivskiy is a well-known Ukrainian novelist and poet who has focused his writing since 1987 on the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. He was one of a group of literati who founded the intensely nationalistic People's Movement of the Ukraine for *Perestroyka*—known there as Rukh—in March 1988, and he later served as its chairman. He tried unsuccessfully to enter the Ukrainian presidential race, but he could not get the required number of signatures to become a candidate. Yavorivskiy is chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet standing commission on Chernobyl accident issues, and following the recent fire, he agitated for an immediate shutdown of the station. (b)(3)

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